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Kurt Hruby

REFLECTIONS ON THE DIALOGUE

AT THE present stage of the Jewish-Christian dialogue, questions like these confront us: Who is our partner? How does he present himself to us? What positions does he hold? What are his objectives in the area that concerns us here? It is easy to speak of Judaism, of the Jewish world, of a Jewish attitude, of a Jewish reaction and so on. But do all these have meaning? Is there a reality that can be grasped, or is there nothing more than a juxtaposition of tendencies and attitudes in which we find it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish a common element? Furthermore, can we truly speak today of Judaism in the religious sense we unfailingly give this term? Is not Judaism rather a sociological phenomenon with certain religious and historical implications?

We must not try to give peremptory or simplistic answers to these questions. In the field we explore, we cannot aim at finding final answers; answers in this field are often uncertain or quickly outmoded by a shifting reality whose evolutionary rhythm is too rapid to allow us a true vision of the whole. We will, therefore, limit our investigations and be satisfied if we can throw some light on a few specific points.

For the Christian world, the phenomenon of Israel is an ecclesiological one. This phenomenon has an historical aspect, the immense common patrimony. It is of the greatest theological importance that, for a long time, the history of man's salvation was fused with the history of Israel. Hence, we must remember Christianity's ontological roots in Judaism. Yet, a vision centered so exclusively on the past is incomplete. The Jewish phenomenon is a theological one, especially in its contemporary aspect, that is, the persistence of the people of Israel as a distinct entity parallel to the Church, whose task consists precisely in continuing Israel's mission in the light of revelation as

fulfilled by Christ. Thus we face the problem of a theological actuality and are not simply engaged in a meditation on the distant past. It includes all the questions the apostle Paul raised in chapters nine through eleven of his Epistle to the Romans. A so-called traditional theology has given an answer that is one-sided and disconcerting. As if the unfathomable riches of God's plan could be exhausted by a purely negative interpretation of Judaism. Such a negative stance is anti-Christian because it leaves no room for Christianity's most important element: the love of Christ.

When we speak of the Jewish-Christian dialogue or the Jewish-Christian *rapprochement*, we must keep in mind that the Church concerns herself with the Jewish problem particularly in order to better define her own nature and mission. She must find out what the continued existence of Israel means in the light of God's election. She must find out the unique mission Israel holds in the work of salvation, for "God never takes back his gifts or revokes his choice" (Rom 11:29). Since Israel continues on its way through history by the will of God, it follows that this progress, as a part of divine revelation, should have actual religious value and be, as it were, a sign for the Church. Of what does this sign consist, and what is its meaning? Does not Judaism, too, have a mission to fulfill? Even within the Christian order, does it not have certain lessons to give the Church, lessons of fidelity to an original inspiration that can lead the Church to her own sources? For the Church as well as for Judaism, these sources are the revealed word of God. To repeat a profound thought expressed by Father Dabosville, Orat.: Is the holocaust of six million Jews in our days nothing more than a news item of the blood-soaked history of mankind? Has it no deeply religious meaning? How are we to interpret the abundance of suffering by the Jewish people through the centuries—in fact, through the millennia—most especially since the beginning of the Christian order?¹ A study in depth of this burning problem, made in the light of God's plan, will open fruitful theological perspectives.

All these questions have a special significance for the Church and Christianity. Their meaning for the Jewish world is entirely different. Let us keep in mind that, for its self-definition, Judaism has no need to concern itself with Christianity. In the Jewish vision, the Christian

1. At a colloquium in Paris, September 1966, organized by the Sisters of Zion.

phenomenon does indeed exist. This existence throughout history has caused anguish and suffering for Judaism but, theologically speaking, it contains nothing that would in any way affect the path Judaism sees marked for itself by divine revelation.

Great Jewish minds have asked whether Christianity, which clearly safeguards the revealed patrimony, has a certain providential mission in mankind's progress toward the acknowledgment of the one and only God. Their answer is "Yes." But this, in their view, does not deprive Israel of its own special mission, leading it toward the same goal, though on a different path. Israel's mission was always understood as a mission of witnessing, not as a mission of conquest. At least, this is the way of most of the great Jewish teachers. Contrary opinions, whether ancient or modern, have always been few and far between.

But what interests Jewry is not so much Christianity as a religion; it is rather the concrete Christian with whom it must live. This co-existence, as we know well, has often been very thorny. Jewry must place itself in relation to the Christian and define him according to the norms of Jewish law. This has been done, and we will speak of it later. Christianity, however, interests the Jew from an entirely different angle, that is, inasmuch as it presents the Christian's attitude to Judaism and to the individual Jew. This explains the keen interest of certain Jewish groups in the work of Vatican II. It is a practical interest, understandable as a result of past experience; it should not be confused, however, with a theological preoccupation, such as exists among Christians. The better to fulfill their mission in the world, Jews are extremely anxious that Christians drop their century-old negative attitude and adopt a more positive vision of Judaism. But this does not mean that Jews are concentrating on Christianity as a religious phenomenon, although this is by no means excluded. Indeed, it would be desirable were contemporary Jewry to manifest interest in this subject. Of this, too, we will speak later.

THE CHRISTIAN PHENOMENON AS INTERPRETED BY JUDAISM

IT DOES not seem useful to go all the way back to the beginnings of the split between Christianity and Judaism, even though it is of

great importance to interpret correctly certain phenomena whose customary explanation has, in the course of centuries, so profoundly shaped relations between Jews and Christians. This question does not enter directly into our study. But the phenomena resulting from this split, located as they are on the historical plane, lend themselves to an objective study based on solid information, a study that can help "cool" the climate history has created between Jews and Christians. It must be admitted that here nothing is all light or all darkness. To heap all the errors on the Church and to declare the Jews innocent of false attitudes, which were equally their own, would be a poor service to historical truth. We are in a domain where, necessarily and almost fatally, passions have been more powerful than reason. It would have been practically impossible to have been otherwise for, historically speaking, the division affected the unity of God's plan. The error of certain Christian theologians was to concentrate too exclusively on the historical design and to forget that the divine reality, incarnate though it is in history, far transcends history, so that the merely historical aspect can never exhaust all the richness of God's plan, so often paradoxical in human eyes.

Is not the preaching of the Cross "folly" according to St. Paul (1 Cor 1:18)? Is not Christ crucified "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1:23)? Is not "the foolishness of God wiser than men" (1:25)? Does not the Apostle invite us to change our perspective when he says: "If any one of you thinks himself wise—by the standards of this world—let him become a fool that he may come to be wise, for the wisdom of the world is foolishness to God" (3:18-19)? Should we not adopt the same vision regarding Israel's attitude toward Christ? Does not the Apostle say: "If their misstep has enriched the world, if their smaller number has enriched the nations, what will their full tale not accomplish!" (Rom 11:12) And again: "If their exclusion meant a world reconciled [to God], what will their inclusion mean if not life from the dead!" (11:15) All this cannot affect the place of Israel in God's plan because "if the first handful of dough is holy, so also is the lump of dough; and if the root is holy, so also are the branches" (11:16).

It is obvious that Jewish reactions to the newly established Christianity had to be dictated by a polemic spirit. The often very harsh

and distasteful remarks that have been preserved, particularly in talmudic literature, ought to be interpreted in this light. Moreover, we must plainly acknowledge that, humanly speaking—that is, based on a tradition far less homogeneous than Christian apologetics has been willing to admit—Judaism could not recognize in Christianity the organic culmination of God's plan. Only a deep misunderstanding of Jewish messianic trends and their development can explain the simplistic views on this subject still to be found in some manuals of Christian theology.

To the teachers of the Talmud, Christianity, seen in relation to Judaism, was necessarily a heresy and Jews who embraced the new religion had to be regarded as *minim*, "heretics," or as apostates. As far as Judaism alone was affected by the new vision of things, the interpretation did not present many problems. Yet, care should be taken not to consider what talmudic literature has to say about the *minim* as addressed exclusively to Christians. First, this term was also applied by the rabbis to Jewish gnostics and many other heretics. Second, the talmudic texts we have were considerably altered by Christian censors who often replaced some term they considered anti-Christian by another.

This attitude began to change quite naturally when Christianity spread more and more among pagans. While a Jew, in the traditional perspective, must conform in all things to the law of Moses and remain wholly faithful to it, the situation of the pagan is different because he is under no such obligation. Tradition, inspired by the most authentic biblical legislation, formally teaches that pagans are not only to be tolerated in Israel but protected if they observe the *shev'a mitzvot b'nei Noah*, "the seven Noachide commandments."² Now if Christianity constitutes, according to the rabbis, a deviation from Judaism, it still safeguards divine revelation—even though with its own interpretation—and brings to the pagan world much more than the so-called Noachide commandments.

Still, long centuries were needed as well as the influence of philosophical systems with which Judaism came in contact—thanks to the

2. According to the Talmud, the seven Noachide commandments contain six prohibitions: idolatry, blasphemy, homicide, rape, incest, and use of the limbs of a live animal; as well as one positive precept, the establishment of judicial institutions (*Sanh.* 56b).

Muslim world—before Jewish thinkers could overcome the trauma created by the painful quarrel with Christianity and reach a more organic appreciation of it.

Saadyah Ben Joseph called Saadyah Gaon, the celebrated head of the talmudic academy of Sura in Babylon (d. 942), was the first to take a position on this delicate problem. In his treatise *Emunot ve-de'ot*, "Beliefs and Opinions," he examined the question of whether Christians should be considered idolators because they believe in the Trinity and the Incarnation, and venerate pictures in their churches. His answer was unequivocal and became the customary one. He said that belief in the Trinity was not idolatrous but rather a personification of the divine attributes of life, power, and knowledge (II, 5).

The first Jewish thinker who tried to see the function of Christianity (and at the same time of Islam, another monotheistic religion) in depth in the history of the salvation of mankind is Judah ha-Levi (d. 1141). He speaks, in his dialogue *The Kuzari*, of the transmission of tradition in Israel. In the course of his account, we find, surprisingly enough, this statement: "Among the disciples of Joshua ben Perachyah there was Jesus the Nazarene." Later, he adds this reflection: "[Christianity and Islam] prepare the way for the coming of the messianic era" in which both Christians and Muslims will share in the same way as the Jews. Then all three will form "the one tree" that Ezechiel saw in his vision (37:17).³

The best-known opinions in this matter are those of the great master of the golden age of Judaeo-Islamic symbiosis in Spain, Moses ben Maimon. In one of his *Responsa*, he declares: "Christians believe and confess, just as we [Jews] do, that the Torah was given by our teacher Moses; it is only in interpretation that they differ from us" (58).⁴ In a way, Maimonides considered Islam superior to Christianity because he believed its monotheism was purer—the great objection of Jewish theologians to Christians being that of *shittuf*, that is, the association of God with other divine powers. Thus he allowed, for example, outward conversion to Islam in time of persecution, if this would safeguard life; under no condition, however, would conversion

3. *Kuzari*, III, 65; IV, 23. See Jehuda Halevi, *Kuzari: The Book of Proof and Argument*, ed. Isaak Heinemann (Oxford, 1947), pp. 101–102, 121.

4. See *Qobetz Teshuvot ha-Rambam ve-Igarotav*, ed. A. Lichtenberg (Leipzig, 1859); cf. *Maamar Kiddush ha-Shem* (Iggeret ha-Shmad), pp. 12ff.

to Christianity be permitted. With regard to Islam, he reasoned that its confession of faith: "There is no God but [the one] God," was quite orthodox from the Jewish point of view. As for the second part of the credo: "And Muhammad is His prophet," a mental reservation was allowed because, as he said, everybody knew that Muhammad was a false prophet. On the other hand, with regard to the understanding of Scripture, his preference was for Christians. Therefore he allowed the Torah to be taught to a Christian because he was at least able to understand it, while he considered the Muslim traditions so confused and based on so many false presuppositions that, in speaking of the Torah to Muslims, one runs the risk of compounding the confusion.

In his theological appraisal of Christianity, Maimonides agrees with Judah ha-Levi. Here are his words: "The teachings of the Nazarene [Jesus] and the Ishmaelite [Muhammad] serve the divine plan to prepare the way for the Messiah who will be sent to perfect the world by serving God in a spirit of unity. [The teachings of Christians and Muslims] have spread the words of Scripture and the law of truth throughout the world."⁵

In Germany, where another important Jewish center was taking shape, this view of Christianity was adopted by Judah ben Samuel of Regensburg in his *Sepher Chasidim* (ca. 1200). After solemnly declaring that Judaism's only purpose is the promotion of love and peace among men, R. Judah speaks of Christianity in terms clear and free of equivocation: "Christianity is not idolatry but *shittuf*."⁶ [On this subtle distinction, see pp. 111 and 117. Ed.] He adds that, for this reason, all that the teachers of the Talmud have ever said against the idolators cannot be in any way applied to Christians.

Hence the Jewish position with regard to Christianity was clearly defined by a sufficient number of authoritative teachers to encourage hope that all strife and argumentation on this subject would henceforth be without basis. Alas, this was not to be.

POLEMICS AGAINST THE TALMUD

DURING the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, an unhappy custom proliferated, one of organized "disputations" with

5. *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Melakim*, XI, 4.

6. See *Sepher Chasidim*, chap. 956, *passim*.

Jewish representatives in order to refute Judaism and to bring about mass conversions. Under the circumstances, that is to say, at a time when Christianity was powerful and triumphant, while Judaism was becoming more and more oppressed and humiliated, the results of these disputations were never in doubt.

The chief argument of Christian theologians was that the traditional literature of Judaism—incarnate, as they said, in the Talmud—was, from beginning to end, full of hateful affirmations against Christ and Christians. This view, which had become a veritable obsession, is not surprising if the crass ignorance of Hebrew studies among Christians at that time is taken into account; nor was Aramaic, the language in which much of the Talmud is written, known. A most unfortunate role was played by certain Jews who had become Christians and who knew almost nothing about the true traditions of Judaism; they often surpassed one another in their hatred of their former co-religionists.

Because the Talmud was branded totally anti-Christian, it was only logical that an effort was made either to destroy all copies by fire or to censor all incriminating passages. All that the teachers of Israel have ever said in the past against *akkum*,⁷ "the idolators," against *minim*, indeed, against any group of enemies of Judaism, was interpreted as if directed against Christians. The Christian censors of the Talmud, almost always unaware of the true scope and correct meaning of certain terms employed in traditional Jewish literature, replaced one expression by another without any criteria of distinction, thereby adding to the inextricable confusion. Very few copies of the Talmud escaped censorship and these few were later used to re-establish a more correct text. But, once misinterpretation set in, quotations were culled from the traditional literature of Judaism and interpreted in such a way as "to meet the needs of the cause." These isolated passages became favorite weapons for anti-Jewish tracts.

As a reaction to this spirit and these methods, Jewish writers tried to show the absurdity of such accusations by a correct interpretation of certain traditional assertions. For several centuries, the appreciation of Christianity was more pragmatic than theological—a necessary consequence of those misunderstandings.

7. Abbreviation of *ovdei kochavim u-mazalot*, "worshippers of the stars and the signs of the zodiac."

As far as Jewish conduct was concerned, the peoples among whom the Jews lived during the Middle Ages, mostly Christians and Muslims, were not meant to be identified with *minim* and *akkum* of which the Talmud speaks. This is expressed in a universally recognized traditional maxim that could be paraphrased as follows: In the nations among whom Jews now live, there are none to whom the epithet *minim* should be applied. R. Solomon ben Isaac of Troyes, called Rashi (1040–1105), the greatest Jewish commentator of the Bible and the Talmud, explicitly says: "Rabbinical laws concerning *minim* do not apply to those who are not of Jewish origin."

Another great talmudic sage of the thirteenth century, R. Menahem ben Solomon of Perpignan (ca. 1249–1310), called Meiri, often commented on the relations of Jews and non-Jews. He insisted that a certain harshness toward pagans manifested by talmudic sayings must not be applied to the peoples among whom the Jews of his time were living and from whom they were distinguished by their religion and their laws.⁸ In the same treatise, the author says of certain laws of exception to the talmudic period: "But whoever belongs to a people observing law and righteousness, and who, in some way venerate the Godhead, even though their beliefs differ from ours, is not affected by these rules. The members of these peoples should be treated in every way . . . like Israelites and without any difference."⁹ At the beginning of the thirteenth century, R. Moses ben Jacob of Coucy, the author of *Sepher Mitzvot Gadol* (*SeMaG*), and Joseph Albo in his *Sepher Ikkarim*, "Book of Principles," expressed themselves firmly in the same manner.

Rarely has a book been more calumniated, in regard to the attitude of Jews to Christians, than the great compendium of rabbinical jurisprudence, the *Shulchan Arukh* of R. Joseph Karo (1488–1575); it repeats and summarizes all the elements of talmudic legislation, including those dealing with the relations of Jews and non-Jews. Now, these rules should evidently be interpreted according to the teaching of the great authorities already cited. Generally, Joseph Karo insists

8. Quoted according to the treatise *Shittah Mekubbetzet* (78a) by R. Betzalel Ashkenazi who borrowed it from Meiri's *Beth ha-Bechirah*.

9. *Ibid.*, 178b.

on three principles: (1) Always act so that each one of your actions will contribute to the advancement of the ways of peace. (2) Always act so that by each one of your actions, the name of God will be sanctified. (3) Always act so that with each one of your actions you will take care not to profane the name of God.

R. Karo included the talmudic principle that the laws of the land should be respected by Jews as true laws, to the extent, of course, that they do not contradict the law of the Torah. He added: "Any act that lowers the Jewish religion in the eyes of non-Jews is a *chillul ha-shem*, 'a profanation of the name of God.'"

R. Karo's contemporaries and later commentators of the *Shulchan Arukh* saw the problem in exactly the same way. R. Joseph Yabetz wrote in his treatise *Ma'amar ha-Achdut*: "The people [among whom we live] believe in creation, the patriarchs, the divinely revealed character of the Torah, hell, paradise, and resurrection. . . . Praised be the Lord who, after the destruction of the second Temple, has sent us this support, because without it—in other words, if idolatry were still with us and spread all over the world [as in the past]—we might have doubted—God forbid!—our own faith."¹⁰

In the first half of the seventeenth century, R. Moses Ribkes of Vilna, one of the most celebrated commentators of the *Shulchan Arukh*, again emphasized the teaching of his predecessors, namely, that the term *akkum*, in Joseph Karo's compendium, can in no way refer to the Christians of his day. To add weight to his words, he invokes the authority of the greatest commentator of *Shulchan Arukh*, R. Moses Isserles of Cracow (1525–1572).¹¹ R. Yair Chayyim Bacharach (1638–1701) teaches in his compendium *Chavvot Yair*: "The non-Jews of our age are in no way idolators, because they believe in the Creator of heaven and earth. Anything unfavorable that the Talmud and the commentaries say about idolators does not apply to [Christians] in any way."¹²

R. Moses Hagiz (ca. 1670–1760) attempts to prove in his *Eleh ha-Mitzvot* that, because of the Mosaic law, Jews must pray for the

10. Ferrara ed. (1533), chap. 3.

11. *Beer ha-Golah* (Amsterdam, 1661).

12. Frankfort (1699), 5b.

well-being of the land in which they live and must promote the welfare of the inhabitants.¹³

The renowned R. Jonathan Eibeschutz (ca. 1690-1764), accused by his colleagues of crypto-Sabbatarianism, held the very same view. This is what he declared about the esteem in which non-Jews should be held: "To the non-Jew who believes in God and His providence, this sentence from the Talmud should be applied: 'Even a non-Jew who devotes himself to [the study of] the Torah should be considered an equal of the High Priest.'"¹⁴

R. Jacob Israel Emden (1697-1776), who often took up the question of relations between Jews and Christians, was respected as the highest talmudic authority of his day. He was the great antagonist of R. Eibeschutz on the question of Sabbatarianism. He was practically the first rabbinical scholar since the Spanish period who referred to New Testament writings. This is his appreciation of the Christian phenomenon: "The gathering together of the peoples of our day can be looked upon as a gathering for the glory of God, the purpose of which is to announce to the whole world that there is only one God, Creator of heaven and earth, who rewards and who chastises. . . . This is what proves their union to be a lasting one: They give [indeed] honor to God and His Torah and proclaim His glory among the nations who do not know Him and who have not heard His call. . . ."¹⁵

In all fairness, we must acknowledge that the unrestrained anti-Jewish polemics of so many Christian theologians brought about a whole range of Jewish books that could be called *Adversus Christianos*; yet they never went much beyond the level of popular tracts. It is surprising that the first to excel in this literary form were Karaite authors. Among the popular writings one cannot ignore is the infamous *Toledot Yeshu*, a collection of talmudic and other legends on the life and person of Jesus, without any historical basis. Though a malicious concoction, it had at one time a wide circulation among certain Jewish groups. It was a kind of popular revenge against the never ending Christian attacks. The oldest sections of the *Toledot Yeshu* were probably written during the eighth century. The great Jewish

13. Amsterdam (1703), commandment 564.

14. Collection of sermons *Ya'arot Devash* I, sermon 3.

15. Commentary *Lechem Shamayim* on *Abot* IV, 14 (1751).

historian Heinrich Graetz called the book "a *factum miserabile*, a wretched memorial, an insipid collection of fragmentary legends."¹⁶ Moses Mendelssohn considered it "a monstrosity."

This historical survey is meant to show that, contrary to what one might think, the positive Jewish attitude toward Christianity is not a modern phenomenon. We have cited a whole series of authors and rabbinical authorities because Judaism knows no other magisterium than that of instruction based on personal authority. The greater the reputation a teacher enjoys within the realm of tradition, the more he is listened to and obeyed in practice. It was necessary, therefore, to show that, in the course of centuries, the masters of traditional teaching reached a certain "consensus" in their evaluation of the Christian reality. Care must be taken lest too great a theological value be attached to this "consensus." A reflection of this kind is foreign to Judaism which, as a whole, is much more a way to follow than a system of doctrines whose articles of faith are to be adhered to unconditionally. No doubt, the credal formulations by the masters of the Spanish period, with their strong theological accents, clash a little with this view, but one must remember that their efforts were somewhat alien to traditional religious thought. With regard to Christianity, the rabbis asked these concrete questions: How should Christianity be judged on the religious plane? What place should it be accorded in the plan of salvation? Above all, what should the practical attitude of Jews be to Christians? Their answers can be broadly summarized as follows:

1. Christianity is not *avodah zarah*, not "idolatry," but *shittuf*, meaning that it associates other powers with God. Now the prohibition of idolatry, which is the first of the seven Noachide commandments, does not demand of non-Jews the acknowledgment of pure monotheism, the rabbis held. The properly theological and cultic aspects, that is to say, the concepts formed of God's nature and the way of serving Him are the unique and exclusive concerns of the adepts of each religion. What interests Judaism is the morality and the actual life of those who renounced idolatry. Already the Tosaphists, the teachers who followed in the wake of the school of Rashi, acknowledged the validity of an oath pronounced by a non-Jew in the name of a saint

16. *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1945), V, p. 185.

because, they said, for all that, "the intention of the non-Jew goes to Him who made the heavens and the earth, in spite of the fact that they associate something else with God's name [because] the sons of Noah were given no instruction on this point."¹⁷

This is a generally accepted opinion, held, for example, by R. Nissim Gerondi (ca. 1340–1380) in his commentary on R. Isaac Alfasi (1103–1103) in the treatise *Avodah Zarah* and summarized in the *Shulchan Arukh* (*Orach Chayyim*, I, 56). R. Moses Isserles, the commentator of the *Shulchan Arukh*, a universally recognized authority, adds this unequivocal sentence that contains the whole traditional position: "Non-Jews have received no divine instruction concerning the association of other powers to God," which again means that it is not to be held against them as an offence.

2. Because Christianity is an authentic religious phenomenon and universally established, the rabbis asked if it must not be accorded a place in the divine plan. This question touches closely on that of the salvation of the nations and the future messianic fulfillment of God's plan. The rabbis were certain that Israel's path had been definitively traced by the Torah; that Christianity's claim of being the messianic fulfillment of this way had to be rejected; that the mission of Judaism, its function in God's plan, and its testimony in the eyes of the world did not need to consider the teaching of Christians. Nevertheless, Christianity had a certain place in God's total plan because, as Maimonides said, "its teaching serves God's plan and prepares the way for the Messiah [because] it has spread throughout the world the words of Scripture and the law of truth." This was, however, only one opinion among others. Some teachers adopted it; yet, it did not gain universal recognition.

3. Since Christianity is not *avodah zarah*, not an idolatrous religion, all the stipulations of the Torah and the Talmud regulating the relations of Jews with idol-worshipping pagans can in no way be applied to the relations of Jews with Christians. In this connection, Christians should be considered as *gerey toshav*, men who observe the seven Noachide commandments, according to the talmudic principle that a *ger toshav* is "anyone who has taken upon himself the seven commandments imposed upon Noah" (*Av. Zar.*, 64b).

Thus the 216 members of a rabbinical conference, convoked in

17. *Tossaphot* of *Sanh.* 63b and *Meg.* 28a.

Germany at the end of the last century, could rightly declare that, according to the best tradition, Judaism knows no moral rule permitting an attitude toward a non-Jew that is prohibited toward a Jew.

THE ACTUAL REALITY OF ISRAEL'S ELECTION

It is fairly clear to Jews how to evaluate Christianity, to "situate" Judaism is a much more complex problem for Christians. A considerable effort has been made especially since Hitler's horrifying persecutions, for they have touched the consciences of many Christians and awakened their interest in Judaism. The Statement on the Jews in the conciliar Declaration on Non-Christian Religions is part of this effort. Yet, if one reads some of the self-styled "theological" manifestoes that appeared after the Israeli-Arab conflict of June 1967, it is evident that confusion is still rampant: What is the meaning of the Jewish people for the Church? What is their function in the plan of salvation after the coming of Christ? To what extent does the people of Israel, even though outside the Christian order, continue to be an important element in God's plan? What is the meaning of Israel's fidelity to its religious patrimony in Christian perspective? All these problems are difficult to answer; I can only present a few basic reflections on them.

"The gracious gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). Because of this, Israel's position as the people of the earlier Covenant is, even in the Christian order, a privileged one. The mystery of Israel is the mystery of divine election and it is because of this election that God will preserve His people until the end of time. In its history, Israel has known grave trials, the most cruel one having occurred during our own lifetime. Yet, its enemies will never succeed in annihilating it. God will keep it "as the apple of His eye," says Scripture, and "He who touches [Israel] touches the apple of [His] eye" (Dt 32:10; Zach 2:8).

The purpose of Israel's election is to make it a witness among the nations of God and His revelation, so that in Israel, according to the promise God made to Abraham, "all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen 12:3). This election, however, is also an election with respect to Christ. It is in Christ that Israel truly becomes the prophetic

people and an instrument of salvation for mankind; Christ is the goal, the fulfillment of Israel's election. Since Christ's death on the cross, it is the whole Body of Christ, all those who believe in Him, who become the chosen people. Still, this does not end the special election of Israel which will continue as a distinct body, until—at the end of time—it will be reintegrated with the Body of Christ from which it is now separated (see Rom 11:26).

Israel has been chosen by God to sanctify His name, to fulfill His will and to prepare the coming of the Kingdom, which is none other than God's universal reign over all creation. God's covenant with Israel, through which its election was ratified, is a pure act of grace. God did not choose Israel for its exceptional qualities or any other motive of this kind.

It was not because you are the largest of all nations that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you, for you are really the smallest of all nations. It was because the Lord loved you and because of the fidelity to the oath he had sworn to your fathers (Dt 7:7-8).

The refusal of obedience, of which Israel was so often guilty in its history, may temporarily interrupt the effects of this election, but it cannot destroy them. It is, in fact, inconceivable that God's plan can be defeated by man's imperfections. "In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some of them were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? Certainly not!" (Rom 3:2-3; cf. 9:6).

God's plan for Israel has not ended: Israel remains the foremost witness of an election by pure grace, witness, too, of God's faithfulness throughout the vicissitudes of man's history. Hence God will not let go of this people till the end, that is, till its final reintegration. Israel will forever be the great paradigm of salvation history, paradigm of the power of grace unfolding itself in this people. In its bosom, too, prepared by all the heroic events of its life, Jesus Christ took flesh. His incarnation is the supreme incarnation of the grace and love of God—gifts granted to Israel as well as to the world. Thus Israel became the sign of the universal reconciliation of all creatures and the exemplar of all that grace works in man.

Israel was chosen in the expectation that it would be God's obedi-

ent people. In all the books of Scripture, the fulfillment of God's promises is always linked to the people's obedience to the Lord's sovereign will, as expressed in the commandments of the Law: "If you hear my voice and keep my covenant . . ." (Ex 19:5). This obedience, then, extends to every domain of life. In the light of the example Israel gives us, we Christians recognize the unlimited obligation, born of grace, to surrender ourselves totally to the will of God. It is this total obedience that constitutes the supreme criterion of every authentic religious attitude. Because God has the right to exact this obedience from His people, He treats Israel with greater severity than other nations who have not entered upon this same obligation. "You only have I favored of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Am 3:2). For this reason, in Scripture the call to repentance is addressed primarily to Israel, and God's all-powerful grace is presented as the final triumph over the sin of the people (Rom 5:12-21).

The election of Israel in the order of grace is an eternal election and an immediate actuality. In this regard, the biblical testimony is absolutely binding and incontestable. Nevertheless, in our Christian order, the eternal character of the election must be seen in a wider perspective. The election applies henceforth to the whole people of God, that is, to all who believe in Christ, and at the same time it subsists for the Israel according to the flesh. In the Old Testament the universal covenant prefigured the particular Covenant with Israel. It is in Christ, and with Israel, that we have all been chosen by God, in an act of pure mercy, through grace and for obedience (Eph 1-2). With Israel, we have all disobeyed God. With Israel, we also have the certitude that God will show us mercy: "For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all" (Rom 11:32).

THE "DISOBEDIENCE" OF ISRAEL

WITH the coming of Jesus, a profound change took place in the history of Israel. First, in regard to the continuity of the history of salvation, the profound significance that the Son of God was not made man in just any human setting but in Israel, a people providentially prepared by God for this unique event. The center of sacred

history is not in a mythical anywhere but in Israel. There, in the midst of the chosen people, His decisive manifestation took place.

We learn from the Gospel that Jesus limited His public ministry, His teaching and preaching, to Israel alone. He, in whom was fulfilled the testimony of the Old Testament, calls the chosen people to a change of heart: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 15:24). He spoke to His disciples in like manner: "Go nowhere among the gentiles . . . but rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 10:5-6). The twelve apostles represent the "remnant" of Israel faithful to the Lord's promises. Jesus' words and all His teaching, from the first day of His public ministry, were addressed to the faithful Israelites living in expectation of the great religious fulfillments foretold by the prophets. His miracles, the signs He wrought, the forgiveness He offered, the promise of a new life in the Spirit—all of these were meant first for Israel.

Yet because of a convergence of circumstances in which religious elements were inextricably mingled with temporal considerations, the majority of people (that is to say, the majority of those who were then living in Palestine, for it must not be forgotten that, numerically, the Jews of the Diaspora were far more important), encouraged in this attitude by the heads and leaders, refused to accept the message of Jesus and to recognize Him as the One sent by God.

Humanly speaking and in its historical context, this refusal was inevitable. For there existed in Israel not one but several messianic traditions which made it practically impossible to find them all realized in a single person and to identify Jesus with all the relevant expectations and hopes. Further, the person of Jesus far surpassed all the messianic expectations of His period because He is not only the messianic deliverer of the old biblical tradition but also the Suffering Servant of the Book of Isaiah as well as the Son of Man of the apocalyptic tradition. If we say: "This is who He is," we express the theological vision of the early Church. I do not wish to touch on the difficult exegetical question of knowing to what extent Jesus, in His life, fully presented Himself as such. This distinction is important because one hesitates to say that in rejecting Jesus "Israel rejected its Messiah" (as is usual) when, throughout His ministry, even His immediate followers seemed to have had no clear idea of His true nature and mission. Under the stress of exterior events, Israel had, at the time

of Jesus, returned to a messianic concept rooted in the ancient biblical soil so that men were looking for a messiah who would free them from the Roman yoke. Yet from the beginning, Jesus, whose kingdom was "not of this world" (Jn 18:36), refused all claims of this kind and thus directly opposed the normal aspirations of the people.

For many centuries, theology—and Christian piety in its wake—decried the "fatality" of the rejection of Jesus' message by the people for whom it was primarily intended. This rejection became definitive as the result of the preaching of the primitive Church and her theological formulation of the person and mission of Jesus. Yet, in all humility, we should recognize that this rejection confronts us with the mystery of God's plan which completely transcends the limits of our human intelligence. The triumphalist theology of an ever growing Church was not capable of such humility. That is why, for many centuries, Israel was made the scapegoat of salvation history. Moreover, this false attitude progressively deepened the trench separating Israel from the Christian world, until it became practically impossible to cross.

The Lord knew from the beginning that the majority of His own people would not recognize Him, but it should not be forgotten that it was also this non-recognition which was to open the gateways to the nations, thus becoming the condition for the salvation of mankind. If Israel had accepted Christ's message, Christianity very probably would have remained a phenomenon limited to Judaism. Christian theologians have seriously ignored the fact that the Jewish stance made possible the salvation of mankind, and that it underlies the theological vision of Roman 9–11. Their interpretation of the fate, destiny, and function of Israel was much more influenced by the historical aspect presented in the Gospels than by the theological reflections of Paul. The Apostle says explicitly that through Israel's "misstep," which was the unwillingness of the people to accept the message of Jesus, "salvation has come to the gentiles" (Rom 11:11).

One can, of course, argue that the Apostle's reasoning is based principally on the specific situation he had to confront. But this does not gainsay the validity of his reflections for this is precisely the situation in which Judaism after Christ presents itself to a Christian perspective. The part of Israel that has kept its proper identity has done so, no doubt, through its continued opposition to Christ's message—

this situation, too, is a mystery of God; it cannot be understood except in the light of *proslēmpsis*, the final "admission," of Israel—a future event of such bearing and importance that the Apostle can compare it to a "life from the dead" (Rom 11:15).

Meanwhile Israel retains the privileges of the election because "if the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump; and if the root is holy, so also are the branches" (Rom 11:16). The position of Israel in regard to Christ, such as Paul saw it and as it continues today—which he calls "a hardening"—will last "until the full number of the gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:25, 26).

THE CHRISTIAN MEANING OF ISRAEL'S PRESERVATION

IN VIRTUE of this impenetrable plan of God, Paul himself speaks of a "mystery" (Rom 11:25): A part of Israel will remain outside the Christian order until the time when all the gentiles will have entered into communion with Christ, because the existence and the persistence of Israel are realities willed by God. Therefore it is an aberration to ignore the reality of Judaism since Christ's coming. But this is exactly what certain theologians have done, and still try to do, under the pretext that, since the Church is the "new Israel," the "ancient Israel" has definitely completed its mission in God's plan. On the contrary, because the religious life of Israel was founded on authentic divine revelation, it preserves its validity inasmuch as it remains faithful to this revelation. We have but to delve into Jewish history to discover the many authentic examples of holiness and spiritual heights that this people has produced during the past two thousand years.

Groups interested in Judaeo-Christian *rapprochement* have often expressed the wish that "the Church would at last acknowledge the fact of Judaism." But how does one "acknowledge" a fact that belongs to the realm of meaning? What is necessary is that theologians finally draw some conclusions from this reality. We see, not without wonder, that all the other peoples of antiquity, with an often highly

developed culture and civilization, have long ago disappeared in the hurricane of history. Despite the countless catastrophes, bloody persecutions, and innumerable torments it has had to endure—often at the hands of “Christians”—Israel is still present in our midst. Miraculously, throughout the ages, it has been protected and preserved. For what purpose? The Christian answer can only be: “Until the times of restoration of all things” (Ac 3:21).

Israel has been preserved by God throughout time to manifest by its existence His fidelity and the triumph of His patience. Listen once again to the apostle Paul: “Then what advantage has the Jew or what is the use of circumcision? Much in every respect. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. What if some of them have not believed? Does their unfaithfulness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means” (Rom 3:1–4). God’s fidelity to His promises and the truth of God are thus made manifest in the preservation of Israel. Eyes of faith see in the existence of Israel the most authentic proof that God’s fidelity never deceives, that the word of God has not been in vain (Rom 9:6). God’s relations with His people have not come to an end, “for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). In and through Israel, God’s fidelity, which cannot fail (2 Tim 2:13), became real, indeed, tangible. Thus Israel remains the mighty example of the absolute power of God’s grace and limitless faithfulness.

The survival and preservation of Israel throughout the Christian order is a mystery of God: By God’s will, Israel continues to exist, parallel to Christ’s Church, a permanent witness of God’s faithfulness to His gracious gifts and to His promises, a witness also in view of its final “admission,” through which the Church will attain her fullness. Consequently, a Christian cannot be indifferent to the ways of this people’s existence, to its destiny, and its journey through history. Summoned by God from patriarchal days, for the fulfillment of His plan of salvation, Israel is so intimately linked to this plan that everything related to its life necessarily has a profoundly religious significance, even if this significance is not immediately clear.

God’s plan has always been in the process of being unfolded in history. This is the reason for the expression “sacred history.” Behind the events of Israel’s history, God is at work, giving that history a

divine dimension. In our time, too, the life of the Jewish people continues to unfold in history, thus giving its events a special meaning that should be interpreted in the light of God's entire plan.

If it is true that, in the Christian vision, Christ is the fulfillment of the prophecies and promises made to Israel, it is equally true that the Old Testament contains oracles that refer more specifically to the national and political existence of Israel on earth, therefore to an existence that still endures. For all these reasons, we should at all times reflect, attentively and reverently, on God's mysterious action manifesting itself in the life of His people and in all that happens in and with Israel. We should remind ourselves that, since Christ's coming, our time is one in which the kingship of God has indeed been made manifest, hence it is the eschatological age, a march toward the end of time, when Israel will be reconciled with Christ.

Thus actual events, such as the ingathering after almost two thousand years of a part of the Jewish people in the promised land, the creation of a Jewish state, the continuing miracle of Israel's preservation in the midst of hostility, are certainly full of meaning in the divine plan of God, even though their exact nature may escape us. The reason is that many Old Testament prophecies concerning the existence of Israel are ambivalent; they refer to the existence of the people of the Old Covenant as well as to the existence of the people of the New Testament, without one aspect excluding the other. Even though the Church has truly become the people of God, in the full sense of this word, the Israel according to the flesh still possesses, as we have seen, the promises.

The fact that one part of the Jewish people, by God's will clearly expressed in Scripture, will be preserved as a distinct entity until the great reunification of all God's people, obviously does not mean that the message of salvation and redemption should not continue to be addressed to the Jews, even with priority as Paul himself says: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: It is the saving power of God to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first but also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16).

We must not forget that the first Christian community was mainly composed of Jews and that Acts 1-11 relates the acceptance of Christ's message by thousands of Jews who had become believers. This believing "remnant" of Israel has been present in the Church ever since

Pentecost, and it is essential for the life of the Church that, during her journey through time, the Jewish element continues to be present there. It must also be recognized that, if the Church is to remain faithful to her mission, she cannot deliberately renounce the duty to proclaim the Gospel to present-day Jews as well. To suppress this aspect for reasons of opportunism would be basically dishonest to our Jewish brothers. Yet, this theological necessity should not be confused with any kind of proselytism in the "classic" sense of the word. Even when proclaiming the Gospel, without distinction, to the whole world, hence also to Israel, the Church must always be aware that, according to God's will, a part of Israel will not heed this appeal.

An entirely different question is that of the conditions of the proclamation of the Gospel to the Jewish world. Taking into account the failure of the Christian world through centuries to appreciate Judaism and the unfortunate attitudes that have resulted, the Church cannot fittingly make itself the herald of the message of love and evangelical brotherhood to the Jewish world—until she has gone through a deep purification, expressed not only in words but in acts.

Nothing, in fact, has more vitiated the relations between Judaism and Christianity than the indiscreet and triumphalist proselytism that certain "convert makers" have allowed themselves and the thorny problem of "converted Jews" which resulted. Up to the time of John XXIII, an adult Jew often had to hear, at the moment of his entrance into the Church, this injunction so false in its perspective: *Horresce judaicam perfidiam, respue judaicam superstitionem*; "In horror, turn away from Jewish unbelief, and reject Jewish superstition"!

In an authentic Christian perspective, a Jew who discovers Christ's grace, anticipates, in his own person, an eschatological event which will one day be that of the whole people. He fulfills his Judaism according to God's plan, just as does his brother who, remaining faithful to his own religious views, also lives in harmony with God's plan, each one acting according to the infinite liberty and liberality of the grace of God. It is not a "conversion" in the sense of abandoning something, but a fulfillment in full awareness of, and fidelity to, all the authentic values of Judaism. But that this may be done in a climate of serenity and of mutual respect for everyone's conscience, there must be a profound change in the whole texture of the co-

existence of Jews and Christians. Until this happens, a Jew's entry into the Christian community will always be resented by his brothers as a betrayal and a desertion, as a "going over" to the enemy. Historically speaking, it has often appeared to be just in this light so that one can only admit the logic of such a Jewish reaction.

JUDAISM'S APPROACH TO CHRISTIANITY

THE situation being what it is for Jews as well as for Christians, we must ask whether the *rapprochement* of the two religions must remain a purely Christian affair, or whether we may expect a similar interest to grow among Jews. This clearly is a question to be asked in full awareness of the great complexity of the "Jewish reality," and not in relation to an unreal and ideal Judaism, as has been the temptation of some theologians and ecumenists.

I cannot attempt here a survey of the present state of Jewish-Christian relations, much less an assessment. Hence I will limit myself to stating some principles.

For greater clarity, it should be recognized that a true approach to Christianity is possible for Jews only on condition that Christians change radically in their manner of viewing and evaluating the reality of Judaism. Reciprocity is of the greatest importance here; Christians must develop and prepare the soil carefully. The burden of history cannot be eliminated by a few fine declarations—well intentioned, no doubt, and, up to a certain point, sincere—particularly when they concern Judaism. The past and its vicissitudes had already left too deep a mark on Jewish existence; the most cruel experiences, however, seem to have been reserved for the present time.

Whatever may be the true responsibilities involved in the persecutions of one time or another, we must clearly acknowledge that, as a matter of historical fact, the fate meted out to Jews by Christians was often atrocious. This has deeply branded the collective consciousness of Jews: the sum total of all the wretched events experienced in the course of time remain a constant trauma.

The events and crimes of the last war certainly cannot be blamed on Christianity, yet it is a fact that they occurred in countries where the Gospel had been preached for many centuries, and they were often

perpetrated by men who had received a Christian education. Nor should we ignore—without fully or unconditionally subscribing to the thesis of Jules Isaac—the share of responsibility in the long-term preparation of these events. The “teaching of contempt” was a theological vision that deeply vitiated the religious appreciation of God’s plan for His people. This is a brutal fact that cannot be eliminated by theological subtleties or distinctions.

This terrible lesson of history must be frankly faced and its inescapable consequences accepted. Otherwise no overture can be expected from Jews. It is futile to try to explain the inexplicable, but we must ask in all humility why Providence has permitted all that has happened to the Jews before our very eyes. Might it not have been *in part* to give our Christian consciences the shock we needed before we could at last humbly acknowledge our errors and to force us to change sincerely our way of looking at Judaism?

This requires, let us repeat once again, an essentially Christian effort. As long as there is no firm decision to favor a new approach to Jewish existence, as long as present-day Judaism is not seen as an entity continuing on its own course through God’s will and remaining, in its own way, part of the plan of salvation, we will wait in vain for a basic modification of the Jewish attitude toward Christians. This is an arduous undertaking and requires much perseverance and patience. Above all, Judaism must not be asked to accept a single crocus for the whole spring. No one gesture, no one document will convince the Jews that the Christian perspective has really changed. The whole life of the Church must furnish proof and for a long time because the sufferings of the Jews, caused by false and unjust Christians, have lasted a very long time, too.

Judaism has just lived through the most cruel and substantial loss that it ever knew during its long and sorrowful history. The Church must show clearly and tangibly that from now on she looks upon Judaism with a respect drawn from God’s plan. She must also show that, if the Christian attitude has changed, it does not mean that she has adopted a new “missionary” tactic dictated exclusively by the desire, even unavowed, to drain Judaism further of its members. Lastly, Christians must become aware of all the distrust that has accumulated in the Jewish mind because of the often indelicate attempts at proselytism by Christians; they could not have been made except

through misjudgment of the intrinsic value and dignity of the Jewish religion.

Meantime, while awaiting the progress of these ideas and their penetration into the Christian consciousness, it is desirable that contacts and exchanges with many different sectors of Jewish life be multiplied so as to bring about a better understanding of every facet of that life. Yet, care should be taken not to expect the same theological and religious preoccupations on the part of Jews which impel Christians to seek these contacts. Jews obviously hope, as we have already said, that Christians will look upon them in a more favorable light than in the past; they will do so only because the historic attitude of Christians has been for them a source of prolonged suffering and endless humiliation. The Christian phenomenon, considered as a religious factor, concerns Judaism very little. God has traced Judaism's path and if Christians are willing to recognize this and to draw the necessary conclusions on the practical level, then Judaism is willing to grant Christianity, as many Jewish thinkers have already done in the past, a place and a function in the salvation of the nations.

It is not at all of recent date that among some Jewish groups there is a genuine interest in Christian problems. This openness is obviously easier among Jewish liberals than among those who remain more attached to the traditional view. The whole gamut of these reactions could be seen at the time of the Council, where almost all those who followed the peripatetics of the famous "Statement on the Jews" with a certain anxiety belonged to the liberal wing; while the leaders of Orthodoxy declared repeatedly that Judaism, because of its own native and proper religious patrimony, should take absolutely no interest in Christianity as a religious phenomenon. In this perspective, collaboration with Christians is conceivable only outside a religious context. A dignified and most promising position was that taken by American Conservative Jews who, instead of refusing all contact with Christians on the religious plane, expressed their conviction that, in this area, Judaism could provide Christianity with valuable and precious support.

Since the last century, many efforts have contributed to lessening the gap that, historically speaking, separates Judaism from Christianity. Among some Jewish groups, in a climate less impassioned than in the past and therefore more open to historical considerations,

the person of Jesus has been rediscovered, an attempt made to situate him in his true Jewish context, to claim him, often with enthusiasm for the Jewish world, evidently without any theological implications.

Without exaggerated optimism or lack of realism, we can say that Judaism, as a whole, is not closed to an approach to Christianity. Because of its complexity, the idea of convergence takes different forms according to the particular branch of Judaism. The time is not yet ripe for a great deal of progress in this respect. But if Christians were to adopt a coherent and resolutely positive attitude toward Jews, they could do much to hasten this evolution so truly necessary, but also so extremely difficult because of the heavily burdened past.

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